

C L A I M S

What is claimed is:

1. In a method for the automatic production of prints from digital photographic image data, comprising the steps of:

storing incoming image data by order, together with order data for use in processing in a processing sequence;

processing the image data by order based on the processing sequence, wherein the processing sequence includes mandatory processing steps that image data from all orders must pass through and may include optional processing steps that image data from specific orders must pass through; and

producing prints from the processed image data;

the improvement wherein the processing sequence of the orders is altered for subsequent processing steps if the image data of an order are required to pass through an optional processing step.

2. Method as defined in claim 1, wherein the processing sequence is altered in dependence upon the capacity of subsequent processing steps.

3. Method as defined in claim 1, wherein optional processing steps are performed independently of the progression of other processing steps.

4. Method as defined in claim 1, wherein orders are completely stored between processing steps.

5. Method as defined in claim 1, wherein optional and mandatory processing steps are performed in parallel.

6. Method as defined in claim 1, wherein an optional processing step comprises of manual processing on an operator's screen.

7. Method as defined in claim 1, wherein an optional processing step comprises automatic recognition of the red-eye effect.

8. Method as defined in claim 1, further comprising the steps of creating reduced supplemental data sets for

processing of image data and processing parameters from said supplemental data sets.

9. Method as defined in claim 1, further comprising the step of providing, as a mandatory processing step, an end processing step in which the image-processing parameters are applied to the entire data set in order to create image data for the prints.

10. Method as defined in claim 1, further comprising the step of displaying the altered processing sequence on the operator's screen.

11. Method as defined in claim 10, further comprising the step of manually selecting the processing sequence for all processing steps.

12. Method as defined in claim 10, further comprising the step of manually selecting the processing sequence for individual processing steps.

13. In apparatus for the automatic production of prints of digital photographic image data, said apparatus comprising:

- (a) an input device for the input of image data and accompanying order data;
- (b) an input buffer for storing several orders;
- (c) an image-processing device for processing image data by order; and
- (d) an output device for producing prints of the processed photographic image data;

the improvement wherein the image-processing device includes several image-processing stations for the processing of at least one order, along with buffer storage between image-processing stations in which at least two orders may be completely stored, said apparatus further comprising a control device, connected with the image-processing stations, for altering the sequence of the orders being processed.

14. Apparatus as defined in claim 13, wherein the control device is connected with the input buffer so that the processing sequence may be manually selected.

15. Apparatus as defined in claim 13, wherein the image-processing device includes at least two processors.